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SUBJECT: TURKEY: DTP SCORES KEY ELECTION VICTORIES IN SOUTHEAST
TURKEY

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1. (SBU) SUMMARY. With over 99% of the votes tallied, official election results confirm a better-than-expected showing in the southeast for pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), which picked up eight mayoral victories as well as 50 district mayor slots. As predicted, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) lost five seats in Adana's consular district, two of them to the DTP. Whether viewing this as DTP strength or AKP weakness, there are multiple interpretations of this outcome for Kurdish intellectuals and policymakers. Voters sent a message that could be anti-AKP, pro-PKK, or simply pro-peace and democracy. The important question now is how AKP will digest these losses in shaping future policies vis-à-vis Kurdish question. END SUMMARY.

DTP RUNS UP THE SCORE

2. (U) DTP scored important electoral victories in Igdir, Siirt and Van, unseating AKP incumbents. They held Sirnak with 54% of the vote, Diyarbakir with over 65%, Hakkari with 79%, as well as Tunceli, where a pro-AKP governor's questionably legal largesse in distributing appliances and sofas to win votes stirred major pre-election controversy and was widely derided by the public as a cheap ploy. Former DTP party provincial chairman in Diyarbakir, Nejdettin Atalay, swept to an easy victory in Batman. DTP further consolidated gains with triumphs in 50 boroughs throughout the southeast, up from 32 in the 2004 local elections. The winners included Abdullah Demirbas, a mayor in one of Diyarbakir city's districts who was removed from office in 2007 for offering municipal services in multiple languages, including Kurdish. (On the district level in Sanliurfa province, Halfeti, hometown of imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, transferred back to DTP control from CHP).

¶3. (SBU) As predicted in reftel, AKP's bungled candidate selections (and unceremonious dumping of some popular incumbents) forced losses of four seats in Adana's consular district: in addition to Siirt and Van, AKP lost Osmaniye to MHP and Sanliurfa to a Saadet Party (SP)-affiliated independent.

AKP rebuffed all three incumbents in those cities, and has now paid the price for what locals consider Prime Minister Erdogan's arrogant interference in local political dynamics outside of his understanding. As expected, AKP remains virtually untouchable in eastern Anatolia (cities such as Adiyaman and Malatya) and in the most conservative pockets of the Kurdish region (Mus, Bingol). While SP upped its vote to over 15% in many cities, the increase was not enough to stop the AKP.

¶4. (SBU) There is a possible fifth loss, Adana, as MHP incumbent Aytac (who was also forced out of the AKP) is in a dead heat with the AKP's Mehmet Ali Bilici. Durak led throughout the vote-counting but Bilici was closing the gap as the final ballot boxes were about to be counted and inconsistencies emerged. Durak is already accusing the AKP of tampering with the results and the dispute will likely require recounts, court cases and several days or weeks to resolve.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT. Speculation about what exactly the DTP's strong showing means has already started. AKP's Kurdish policy has included initiatives such as the establishment of a Kurdish state TV channel TRT-6, support for the Ergenekon investigation and approval of Kurdish language departments in universities that should have translated into more votes in the southeast. But Erdogan's rhetoric, including an emotional "love it or leave it" statement, and AKP's approval of cross-border military operations have sapped trust among Kurds, apparently leading

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many to conclude the AKP is really just another pro-establishment party. The question now is what the AKP will do with this electoral lesson - will it redouble efforts to compete with DTP by reaching out more to the Kurds or behave more like an establishment party and ignore their demands? END COMMENT.

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